THE CZAR'S SPY

By Chevalier William Le Queux

"Then the body is still in the glen, where you left it?"

"Yes. If you wish, I will take you to the spot. I can drive you and your assistant up there."

"Certainly. Let us go,' he exclaimed, rising at once and ringing his bell.

"Get three good lanterns and some matches, and put them in this gentleman's trap outside," he said to the constable who answered his summons. "And tell Gilbert Campbell that I want him to go with me up to Rannoch Wood."

"Yes, sir," answered the man; and the door again closed.

"It's a pity—a thousand pities, Mr. Gregg, that you didn't stop those two men who buried the body."

"They were already across the stream, and disappearing into the thicket before I mounted the rock," I explained. "Besides, at the moment I had no suspicion of what they'd been doing. I believed them to be stragglers from a neighboring shooting party who had lost their way."

"Ah, most unfortunate!" he said. "I hope they don't escape us. If they're foreigners, they are not likely to get away. But if they're English or Scots, then I fear there's but little chance of us coming up with them. Yesterday at the inquest the identity of the murdered man was strictly preserved, and the inquiry was adjourned for a fortnight."

"Of course my name was not mentioned?" I said.

"Of course not," was the detective's reply. Then he asked: "When do you expect to get a telegram from your friend, the Consul at Leghorn? I am anxious for that, in order that we may commence inquiries in London."

"The day after tomorrow, I hope. He will certainly reply at once, providing the dead man's father can still be found."

And at that moment a tall, thin man, who proved to be Detective Campbell, entered, and five minutes later we were all three driving over the uneven cobbles of Dumfries and out in the darkness towards Rannoch.

It was cloudy and starless, with a chill mist hanging over the valley; but my uncle's cob was a swift one, and we soon began to ascend the hill up past the castle, and then, turning to the left, drove along a steep, rough by-road which led to the south of the wood and out across the moor. When we reached the latter we all descended, and I led the horse, for owing to the many treacherous bogs it was unsafe to drive further. So, with Mackenzie and Campbell carrying lanterns, we walked on carefully, skirting the wood for nearly a mile until we came to the rough wall over which I had clambered with Muriel.

I recognized the spot, and having tied up the cob we all three plunged into the pitch-darkness of the wood, keeping straight on in the direction of the glen, and halting every now and then to listen for the rippling of the stream.

At last, after some difficulty, we discovered it, and searching along the bank with our three powerful lights, I presently detected the huge moss-grown boulder whereon I had stood when the pair of fugitives had disappeared.

"Look!" I cried. "There's the spot!" And quickly we clambered down the steep bank, lowering ourselves by the branches of the trees until we came to the water into which I waded, being followed closely by my two companions.

On gaining the opposite side I clambered up to the base of the boulder and lowered my lantern to reveal to them the gruesome evidence of the second crime, but the next instant I cried—

"Why! It's gone!"

"Gone!" gasped the two men.

"Yes. It was here. Look! this is the hole where they buried it! But they evidently returned, and finding it exhumed, they've retaken possession of it and carried it away!"

The two detectives gazed down to where I indicated, and then looked at each other without exchanging a word.

As we stood there dumbfounded at the disappearance of the body, the Highlander's quick glance caught something, and stooping he picked it up and examined the little object by the aid of his lantern.

Within his palm I saw lying a tiny little gold cross, about an inch long, enameled in red, while in the center was a circular miniature of a kneeling saint, an elegant and beautifully executed little trinket which might have adorned a lady's bracelet.

"This is a pretty little thing!" remarked the detective. "It may possibly lead us to something. But, Mr. Gregg," he added, turning to me, "are you quite certain you left the body here?"

"Certain?" I echoed. "Why, look at the hole I made. You don't think I have any interest in leading you here on a fool's errand, do you?"

"Not at all," he said apologetically. "Only the whole affair seems so very inconceivable—I mean that the men, having once got rid of the evidence of their crime, would hardly return to the spot and reobtain possession of it."

"Unless they watched me exhume it, and feared the consequences if it fell into your hands," I suggested.

"Of course, they might have watched you from behind the trees, and when you had gone they came and carried it away somewhere else," he remarked dubiously; "but even if they did, it must be in this wood. They would never risk carrying a body very far, and here is surely the best place of concealment in the whole country."

"The only thing remaining is to search the wood at daylight," I suggested. "If the two men came back here during my absence they may still be on the watch in the vicinity."

"Most probably they are. We must take every precaution," he said decisively. And then, with our lanterns lowered, we made an examination of the vicinity, without, however, discovering anything else to furnish us with a clew. While I had been absent the body of the unfortunate Armida had disappeared—a fact which, knowing all that I did, was doubly mysterious.

The pair had, without doubt, watched Muriel and myself, and as soon as we had gone they had returned and carried off the ghastly remains of the poor woman who had been so foully done to death.

But who were the men—the fellow with the broad shoulders whom Muriel recognized, and the slim seafarer in his pilot-coat and peaked cap? The enigma each hour became more and more inscrutable.

At dawn Mackenzie, with four men, made a thorough examination of the wood, but although they continued until dusk they discovered nothing, neither was anything heard of the mysterious seafarer and his companion in brown tweeds.

I called on Muriel as arranged, and explained how the body had so suddenly disappeared, whereupon she stared at me pale-faced, saying—

"The assassins must have watched us! They are aware, then, that we have knowledge of their crime?"

"Of course," I said.

"Ah! "she cried hoarsely. "Then we are both in deadly peril—peril of our own lives! These people will hesitate at nothing. Both you and I are marked down by them, without a doubt. We must both be wary not to fall into any trap they may lay for us."

Her very words seemed an admission that she was aware of the identity of the conspirators, and yet she would give me no clue to them.

We went out and up the drive together to the kennels, where her father, a tall, imposing figure in his shooting-kit, was giving orders to the keepers.

"Hulloa, Gregg!" he cried merrily, extending his hand. "You'll make one of a party to Glenlea tomorrow, won't you? Paton and Phillips are coming. Ten sharp here, and the ladies are coming out to lunch with us."

"Thanks," I said, accepting with pleasure, for by so doing I saw that I might be afforded an opportunity of being near Muriel. The fact that the assassins were aware of our knowledge seemed to have caused her the greatest apprehension lest evil should befall us. Then, as we turned away to go back to the house, Leithcourt said to me—

"You know all about the discovery up at the wood the other day! Horrible affair—a young foreigner found murdered."

"Yes, I have heard about it," I responded.

"And the police are worse than useless," he declared with disgust. "They haven't discovered who the fellow is yet. Why, if it had happened anywhere else but in Scotland, they'd have arrested the assassin before this."

"He's an entire stranger," I hear," I remarked. And then added: "You often go up to the wood of an evening after pigeons. I'ts fortunate you were not there that evening, eh?"

He glanced at me quickly with his brows slightly contracted, as though he did not exactly comprehend me. In an instant I saw that my remark had caused him quick apprehension.

"Yes," he answered with a sickly smile which he intended should convey to me utter unconcern. "They might have suspected me."

"It certainly is a disagreeable affair to happen on one's property," I said, still watching him narrowly. And then Muriel at his side managed with her feminine ingenuity to divert the conversation into a different channel.

Next day I accompanied the party over to Glenlea, about five miles distant, and at noon at a spot previously arranged, we found the ladies awaiting us with luncheon spread under the trees. As soon as we approached Muriel came forward quickly, handing me a telegram, saying that it had been sent over by one of my uncle's grooms at the moment they were leaving the castle.

I tore it open eagerly, and read its contents. Then, turning to my companions, said in as quiet a voice as I could command—

"I must go up to London tonight," whereat the men, one and all, expressed hope that I should soon return. Leithcourt's party were a friendly set, and at heart I was sorry to leave Scotland. Yet the telegram made it imperative, for it was from Frank Hutcheson in Leghorn, and read—

'Made inquiries. Olinto Santini married your servant Armida at Italian Consulate-General in London about a year ago. They live 64B, Albany Road, Camberwell; he is employed waiter Ferrari's Restaurant, Westbourne Grove.—British Consulate, Leghorn."

The lunch was a merry one, as shooting luncheons usually are, and while we ate the keepers packed our morning bag—a considerable one—into the Perthcart in waiting. Then, when we could wander away alone together, I explained to Muriel that the reason of my sudden journey to London was in order to continue my investigations regarding the mysterious affair.

This puzzled her, for I had not, of course, revealed to her that I had identified Olinto. Yet I managed to make such excuses and promises to return that I think allayed all her suspicions, and that night, after calling upon the detective Mackenzie, I took the sleeping-car express to Euston.

The restaurant which Hutcheson had indicated was, I found, situated about half-way up Westbourne Grove, nearly opposite Whiteley's, a small place where confectionery and sweets were displayed in the window, together with long-necked flasks of Italian chianti, chump-chops, small joints and tomatoes. It was soon after 9 o'clock when I entered the long shop with its rows of marble-topped tables and greasy lounges of red plush. An unhealthy-looking lad was sweeping out the place with wet sawdust, and a big, dark-bearded, flabby-faced man in shirt-sleeves stood behind the small counter polishing some forks.

"I wish to see Signor Ferrari," I said, addressing him.

"There is no Ferrari, he is dead," responded the man in broken English. "My name is Odinzoff. I bought the place from madame."

"You are Russian, I presume?"

"Polish, m'sieur—from Varsovie."

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